UNITED NATIONS

CEDAW

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

Distr.
GENERAL

CEDAW/C/SR.383
13 November 1998

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

Eighteenth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 383rd MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Friday, 6 February 1998, 5 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. KHAN

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The meeting was called to order at 5 p.m.

WAYS AND MEANS OF EXPEDITING THE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE (continued) (CEDAW/C/1998/I/WG.I/WP.1)

1. Ms. CONNORS (Women's Rights Unit) drew the Committee's attention to a number of changes in the report of Working Group I on ways and means of expediting the work of the Committee as contained in document CEDAW/C/1998/WG.I/WP.1. In paragraph 18, South Africa should be added to the list of initial reports; Belarus should be removed from the list of third periodic reports; Belarus and Spain should be added to the list of fourth periodic reports as back-up if other State party delegations were unable to attend.

2. In paragraph 19, Algeria should be added to the list of initial reports; Belarus and Spain should be added to the list of fourth periodic reports if other State party delegations were unable to attend. In paragraph 20, the second clause should read "the Committee will consider the third periodic report of Belarus/Spain". In paragraph 21, Sweden should be added to the list of fourth periodic reports, and Denmark would become the back-up report.

3. Ms. AOUIJ introduced the report of Working Group I on ways and means of expediting the work of the Committee (CEDAW/C/1998/I/WG.I/WP.1). It would be very useful to write to specialized agencies and organizations of the United Nations system identifying members of the Committee who served as the focal point for the particular agency or organization and requesting that each should nominate an individual to serve as the focal point for the Committee. A focal point should also be nominated to liaise with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Specialized agencies and non-governmental organizations should be invited to attend the presentation of State party reports and should be encouraged to submit shadow reports. Further steps should be taken to establish cooperation with the Special Rapporteur on violence against women.

4. The Chairperson would be entrusted with the task of expressing courtesies to the representatives of reporting States on behalf of all Committee members. In order to save time, members of the Committee should refrain from doing so. In addition, Committee members should endeavour not to replicate questions. The Human Rights Committee's "Guidelines for the exercise of functions by members of the Committee" should be circulated among members for consideration and comment. Members of the Committee should refrain from participating in the consideration of reports of States of which they were nationals.

5. The recommendations on contemporary forms of slavery issued by the Subcommission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities should be integrated into the work of the Committee. It should continue to focus on the extent to which adolescent girls enjoyed their human rights, including their rights to reproductive and sexual health. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) should be invited by the Chairperson to present to the Committee an analysis of the impact of their policies on women's enjoyment of rights. Finally, the Chairperson should attend, inter alia, the

special meeting of the persons chairing the human rights treaty bodies in February 1998. With regard to the regional composition of the pre-sessional working group, negotiations were still under way regarding the African members.

6. Ms. CONNORS (Women's Rights Unit) said that a list of the country rapporteurs for each of the upcoming State party reports had been circulated. The same document listed the members responsible for preparing questions in the pre-sessional working group and the members acting as focal points for specialized agencies.

7. Ms. ABAKA said that all her attempts to establish contact with the Subcommission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities had come to nothing.

8. Ms. OUEDRAOGO said that she had experienced the same problem with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

9. The CHAIRPERSON said that she would send a letter to those organizations reminding them of the name of the Committee's focal point.

10. Ms. AOUIJ said that those organizations should themselves be pressed to provide the name of a contact. In addition, it was necessary to appoint focal points for UNHCR, the World Bank and IMF.

11. Ms. SHALEV asked whether all previous reports would be provided to country rapporteurs and their alternates for ease of comparison with reports under consideration.

12. Ms. CONNORS (Women's Rights Unit) said that Committee members would be provided with whatever material they needed.

13. Ms. CORTI said that the practice of assigning three Committee members to prepare questions on each report by a State party had not worked well in the past. Absolute commitment was required from all members of the team to avoid unfair distribution of the workload.

14. Ms. SCHÖPP-SCHILLING said that she had never been asked for feedback on her contacts with other agencies and organizations. She proposed that the words "and for consideration and adoption at the nineteenth session" should be added at the end of paragraph 9 of the report of Working Group I.

15. Ms. BUSTELO GARCÍA DEL REAL said that she too had never been asked to report on her findings. She intended to summarize what she had learned in a paper, which she would subsequently circulate to other members of the Committee. In anticipation of possible enquiries, the Secretariat should clarify why the latest periodic report of Spain was being held in reserve. With reference to Ms. Corti's misgivings about the three-person country teams, her experience had been that the specialist knowledge which each team member brought to the group had been beneficial.

16. Ms. SINEGIORGIS said that she supported the amendment proposed by Ms. Schöpp-Schilling to paragraph 9 but felt that the words "and adoption"

should be deleted since the Committee could not bind itself to adopt something in the future.

17. Ms. ABAKA suggested that the proposal to amend the rules of procedure should be placed on the agenda of Working Group I for the summer session.

18. Ms. AOUIJ said, with regard to paragraph 6 of the draft report, that the decision to assign three members to prepare questions on each country report had been taken several sessions earlier in an attempt to ensure an equitable and balanced approach. It could, of course, be amended if members so desired. With regard to paragraph 7, a sentence about the requirement for members to submit questions on country reports to the pre-session working group could be added in order to make it part of Committee practice. She agreed with the amendment to paragraph 9 as proposed by Ms. Sinegiorgis. Finally, it would be acceptable for the focal points for the various other human rights bodies to make written reports.

19. Ms. SCHÖPP-SCHILLING requested the Secretariat to draw up a list of the decisions that the Committee had taken regarding procedures, which could be reviewed by Working Group I at the summer session. In preparation for the transition to a post-session working group in January 1999, it could attempt to streamline those procedures.

20. The report of Working Group I (CEDAW/C/1998/I/WG.I/WP.1), as amended, was adopted.

ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON ITS EIGHTEENTH SESSION (CEDAW/C/1998/L.1 and Add.1-9)

21. The draft report of the Committee on its eighteenth session, as contained in document CEDAW/C/1998/L.1 and Add.1-9, was adopted.

22. Ms. TIMOTHY (Division for the Advancement of Women) said that the Secretariat would consult members regarding the items to be taken up by the Working Groups at the nineteenth session.

Draft decision concerning the statement by the High Commissioner for Human Rights

23. Ms. SINEGIORGIS read out the text of a draft decision concerning the statement to the Committee by Mrs. Robinson, High Commissioner for Human Rights.

24. The draft decision was adopted.

PROVISIONAL AGENDA FOR THE NINETEENTH SESSION

25. The provisional agenda for the nineteenth session was adopted.

CLOSURE OF THE SESSION

26. Ms. KING (Assistant Secretary-General, Special Adviser on Gender Issues an Advancement of Women) said that there had been many indications during that productive session of the growing importance of the Committee in the field of human rights. The meeting between the pre-session working group and the specialized agencies, for instance, had been very fruitful and should be repeated in the future. The interest and involvement of non-governmental organizations were also growing, and their contributions had been very helpful to the reporting process.

27. Cooperation with specialized agencies was increasingly important, as witnessed by the support of UNFPA in preparing the draft general recommendation on article 12, especially in the area of reproductive and health rights, and th closer collaboration with UNICEF on t[illegible] rights of the girl child. The visit of the High Commissioner for Human Rights had demonstrated the importance that she attached to the Committee, and note had been taken of her suggestions for strengthening links with the Centre for Human Rights.

28. A great deal of progress had been made on the general recommendation on article 12, and the process of its final adoption should be smooth. The statement on reservations to the Convention would also be a very important contribution to the observance of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and she hoped that it could be adopted at the nineteenth session.

29. Finally, in the complex reports considered during the session, including those of four countries in transition, she had been struck by the common problems referred to, despite the diversity of the situations concerned, and by the persistence of patriarchal cultural values. She pledged her full support and that of the Division to the Committee in continuing its important work.

30. After an exchange of courtesies, in which Ms. AOUIJ, Ms. CORTI and Ms. BUSTELO GARCÍA DEL REAL participated, the CHAIRPERSON declared the eighteenth session of the Committee closed.

The meeting rose at 6.15 p.m.